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## *Interurban to Stillwater*

**-Aaron Isaacs**

Twin City Lines covered the Stillwater-Mahtomedi line from downtown St. Paul to North St. Paul in the Winter 2014 issue, so photos and maps in this story will mostly stay north of North St. Paul.

### **Before TCRT**

The transit connection between St. Paul and Mahtomedi started rather inconveniently. The East 7th Street cable car line opened in 1889 from downtown to Duluth Avenue. A year later, the steam-powered North St. Paul Railroad met the east end of the cable car line and built as far as North St. Paul. In 1892 it was reorganized, changing its name to the St. Paul & White Bear Railroad. It electrified and extended its line north to Mahtomedi, to a connection with the Northern Pacific. Trains ran every 30 minutes. It still transferred passengers to TCRT, but the cable line had been electrified.

The St. Paul & White Bear took a major step to ensure the line's financial viability by opening Wildwood Park on the southeast corner of White Bear Lake. Suburban amusement parks served by trolley lines were a national trend and some remain in operation today. Wildwood would last through 1938 and added significantly to the traffic on the line.

TCRT acquired the St. Paul & White Bear in 1898. It was the company's first expansion outside Minneapolis and St. Paul. For various legal and financial reasons, TCRT created a corporate sub-



sidiary, the Minneapolis & St. Paul Suburban Railway, to be the owner. Thereafter all the suburban lines fell under its corporate umbrella.

### **On to Stillwater**

As the 1890s drew to a close, the interurban craze for trolleys between cities was gathering momentum. TCRT was not immune to its pull. Of the population centers located within 20 miles of St. Paul, the largest was Stillwater with 14,000 residents in 1900. Stillwater was also a manufacturing hub, shipping out lumber and farm machinery and was home to the state prison.

Two different railroads' suburban steam trains connected Stillwater with St. Paul. The Omaha Road had the

more direct route via Lake Elmo and fielded 9-11 daily trips during the 1890s. Some ran through and others required a transfer to mainline trains at Stillwater Junction, three miles southwest of town. Running time to St. Paul was 45 minutes. The Northern Pacific's route via White Bear Lake was much less direct. There were 4-6 daily trips, most of which required passengers to transfer at White Bear Lake. Running time to St. Paul was 65-75 minutes.

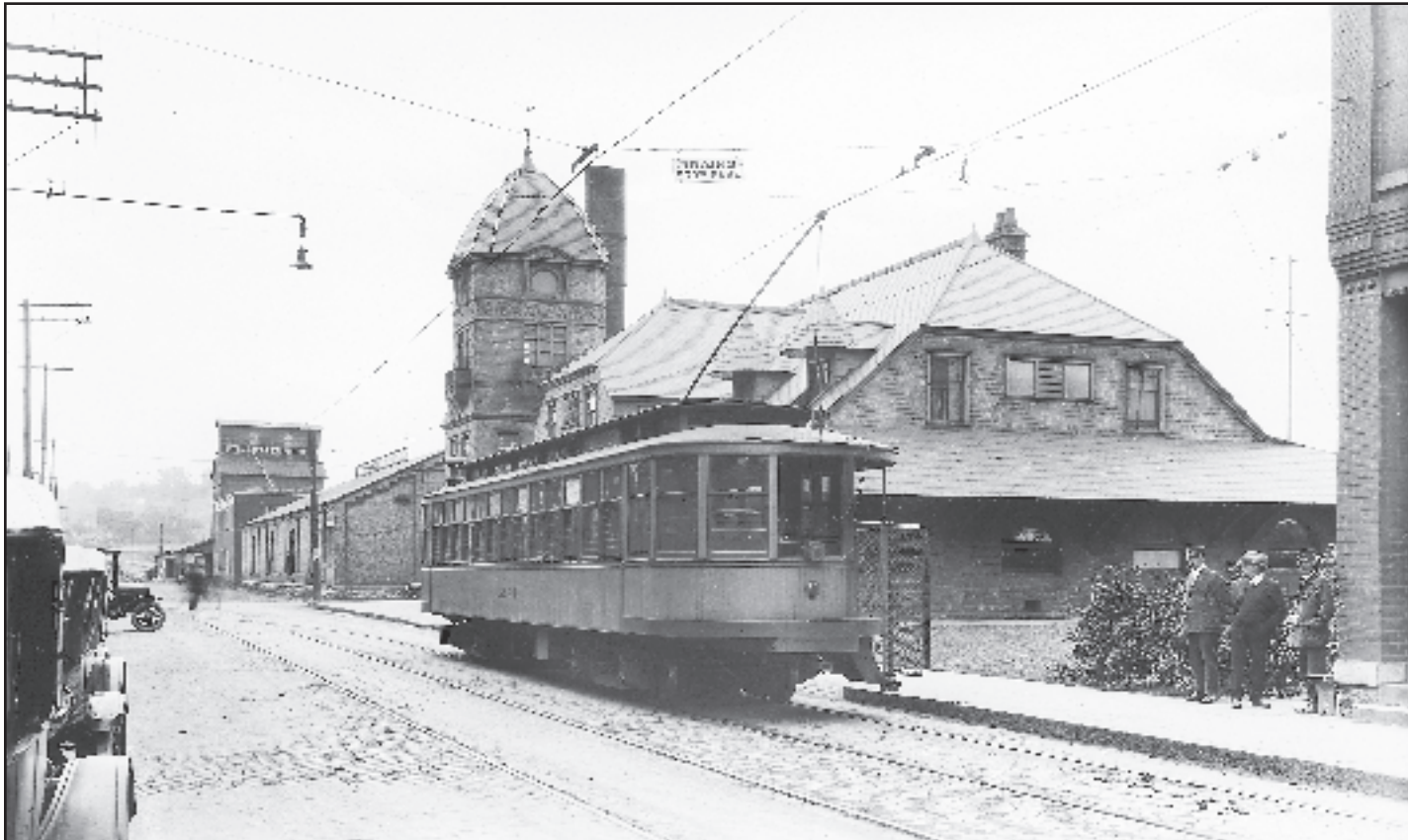
All over the country, from about 1895 to 1915, electric lines challenged the steam roads for the short haul local market, especially between major cities and nearby towns. Now that TCRT owned the St. Paul & White Bear, it instituted through service

Front cover: This issue is dedicated to the Stillwater Division and its branches to Mahtomedi and White Bear Lake. A St. Paul-bound interurban negotiates "Rattlesnake Curve", just west of Stillwater along McKusick's Lake.

Inside front cover: Top-This section of the 1909 system map shows the Stillwater Division;

Bottom left- The South Stillwater and Owen Street local lines in Stillwater had to climb the 7.5 percent grade from downtown on South 3rd Street to attain the hilltop neighborhoods.

Bottom right- The White Bear Lake map from TCRT's tourist brochure.



Above left: In open country passing Long Lake.

Above: A block signal protects the single track at Parrant's Siding, just outside Stillwater. John Runk photo.

Left: The interurbans terminated at Stillwater Union Depot, where it met the branch line trains of the Northern Pacific, Milwaukee Road and Omaha Road. The siding was added in 1912, permitting the local streetcars, which didn't take layover, to bypass the interurbans. At the same time the loop was changed from clockwise to counter-clockwise.



between St. Paul and Mahtomedi. From Willernie, just south of Mahtomedi, it was only 8.4 miles to Stillwater. TCRT built that link in 1899.

It almost didn't happen. When Stillwater considered TCRT's request for a franchise, it imposed a requirement to operate local streetcar lines in addition to the interurban. TCRT balked, and the city council awarded the franchise to a competing company based in Cleveland, Ohio. However, the mayor vetoed the franchise, because at the last minute TCRT had submitted a proposal that included local service. The council reconsidered and awarded the franchise to TCRT. Service was inaugurated on August 23, 1899.

Unlike other markets they had entered, the electric cars did not put the steam trains out of business. They persisted into the late 1920s. Still, the electric cars dramatically improved access to Stillwater. They ran every 30 minutes from 6 AM to midnight. End to end travel time between St. Paul and Stillwater was 70 minutes. That may not seem competitive with a 45-minute steam train, but bear in mind that the streetcar made local stops all through Stillwater and served the center of downtown St. Paul, while steam train passengers had to walk into town from the St. Paul Union depot. That, combined with their high frequency, 30 cent fare and lack of soot and cinders, made the electrics competitive.

### The Stillwater local lines

The Stillwater rail operation was considerably more complicated than the Minnetonka operation. Unlike TCRT's Minnetonka lines, the Stillwater Division sprouted four connecting lines that were all scheduled to feed each other for convenient intra-suburban trips. TCRT's franchise with

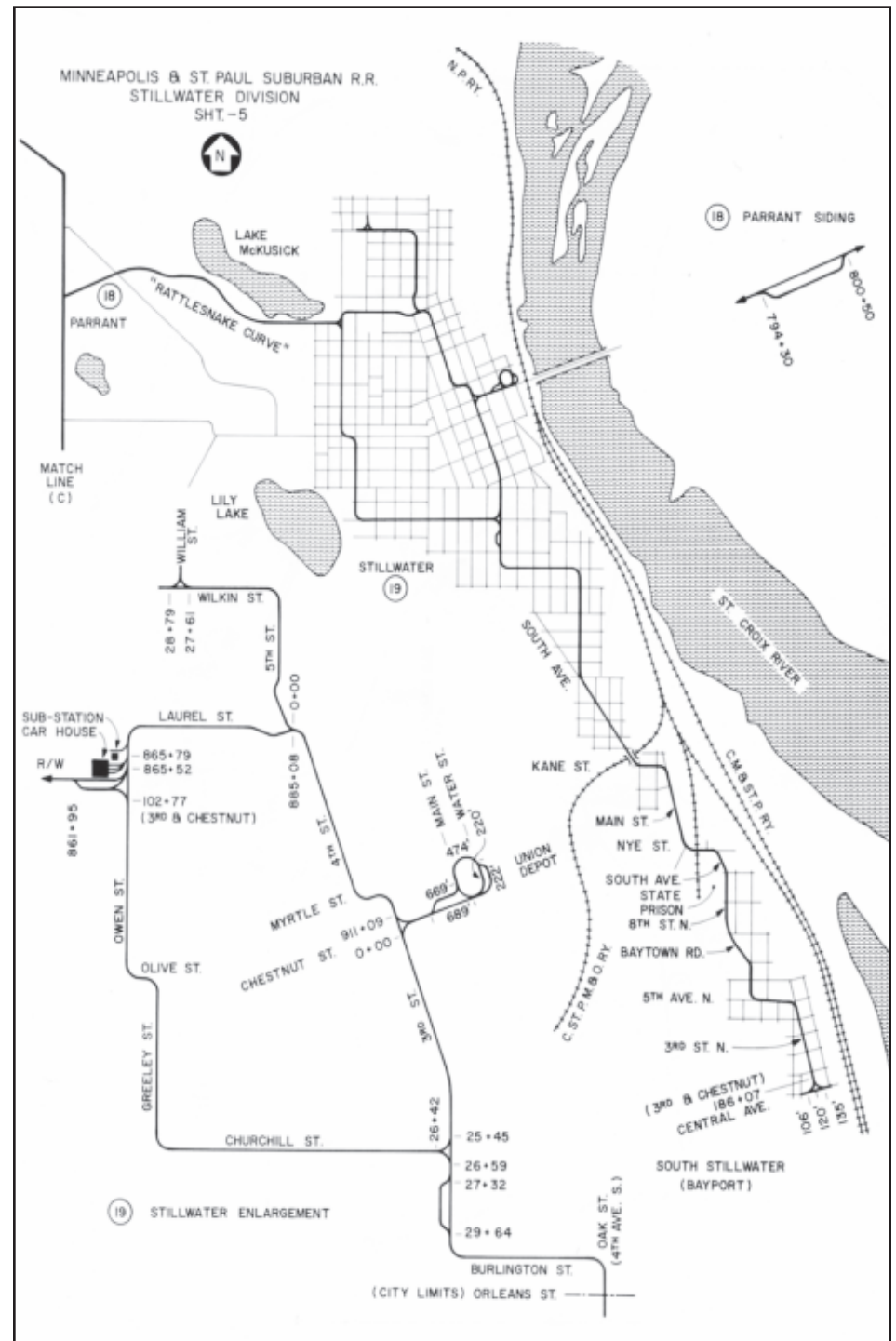
the City of Stillwater required it to build and operate local streetcar lines. The city was eager to replace the independent Stillwater Street Railway, which had opened in 1889 and folded in either 1896 or 1897. It had operated the length of Main Street in downtown, with two lines that climbed the steep hills to the north and south sides of town.

TCRT chose slightly different alignments to reduce the steepness of the grades, and built three lines that radiated from downtown Stillwater. The Wilkin Street line basically replicated and extended the Stillwater Street Railway's former north hill line, terminating at Wilkin and Williams Streets near the north edge of town.

The interurban to St. Paul followed it to 5th & Laurel Streets, before diverging on Laurel to Owen Street, where it entered private right of way and set out across the open country. The interurbans provided additional local service within Stillwater.

The south hill line climbed away from downtown on 3rd Street and ended at Oak and Orleans Street, the south city limits of Stillwater. That changed in 1905 when the line was extended 3.5 serpentine miles via Stagecoach Trail to South Stillwater (later renamed Bayport). Much of this was through unpopulated country, but in 1915 the new Stillwater State Prison opened, with the streetcar stopping literally at its front door. The Wilkin Street and South Stillwater lines were operated as a through service every 30 minutes, using two streetcars. In both directions the line took a detour via downtown, looping past the Stillwater Union Depot.

The third local line, the Owen Street line started at the Union Depot, climbed the South 3rd Street hill along with the South Stillwater cars, then headed west on Churchill Street and







Above left: A postcard from about 1900 shows single truckers in local service at Chestnut and Main.

Above: Transfers between streetcars happened at 3rd & Chestnut, overseen by the starter in the little booth.

Left: An Owen Street local car enters the depot loop as an interurban heads up Chestnut Street.

Opposite: An inbound car from the Wilkin Street line and headed for South Stillwater enters the Union Depot loop on Chestnut Street. All John Runk photos.

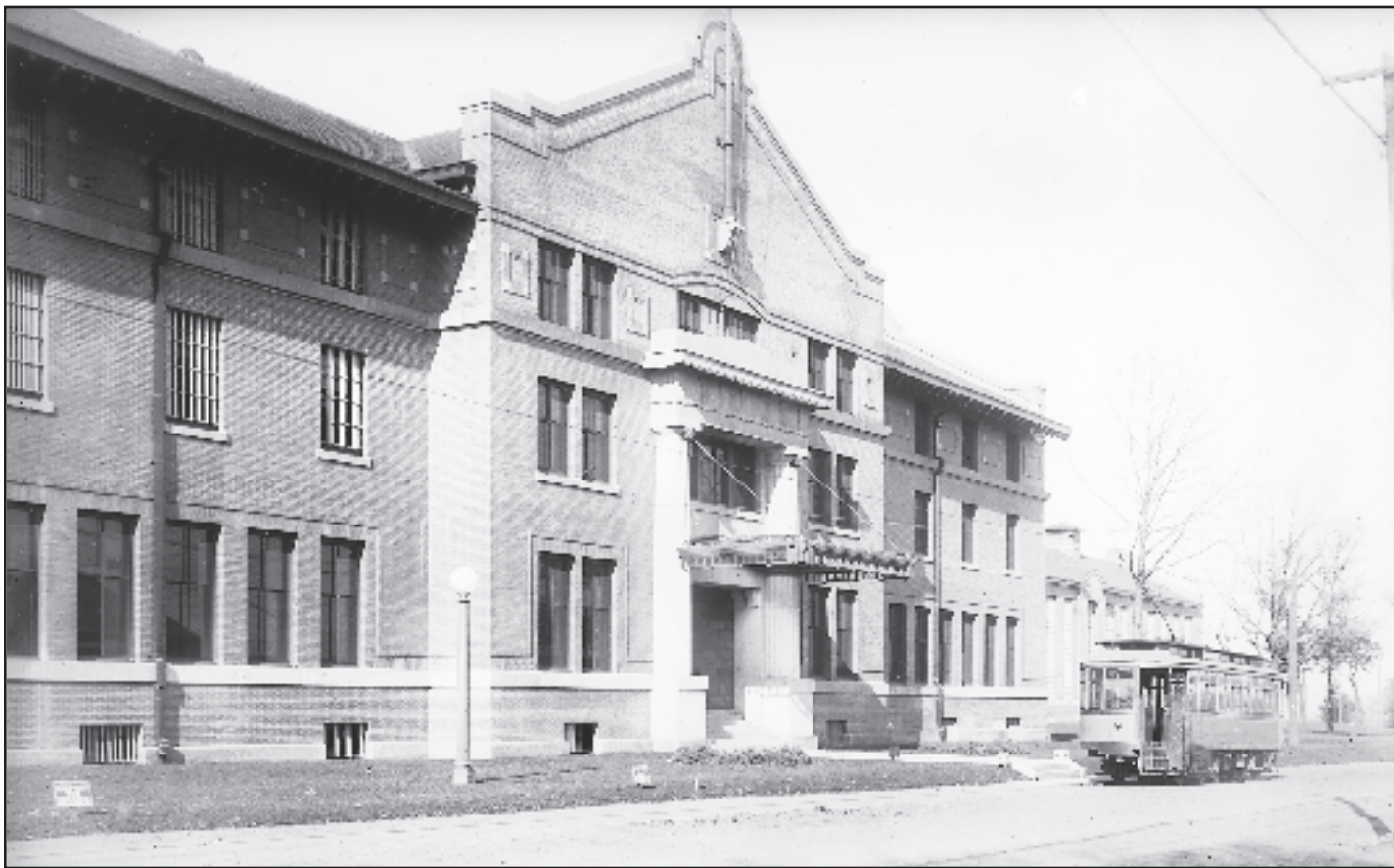












Left: Another great John Runk photo of a Wilkin Street car southbound on Main Street, about to turn right onto Chestnut. Above: The South Stillwater line stopped at the front door of Stillwater State Prison. Below: The end of the line in South Stillwater.



north on Greeley and Owen Streets. It terminated at the Owen Street Station carhouse, where it met the interurban on its way out of town. A single car provided the 30-minute frequency. The first and last interurban trips of the day followed the Owen Street line, subbing for the local car.

The local lines and the interurban converged at the intersection of 3rd Street and Chestnut. From there they all descended two blocks into downtown, then made a loop that circled the block of Chestnut, Water Street, Myrtle Street and Main Street, terminating at the Stillwater Union Depot.

Even though they all served the Union Depot, the corner of 3rd and Chestnut was the real operating hub. All the lines, interurban and local, were scheduled to meet at 3rd and Chestnut at 8 and 38 minutes after each hour. Passengers could transfer between them to continue their trips, conveniently linking every origin/destination pair. A fixed post supervisor occupied a small shanty at the base of the Chestnut Street steps and oversaw the connections.

### Mahtomedi and White Bear

Now a branch off the main line, the 2 miles from Willernie to Mahtomedi initially lost most of its through service to St. Paul. From 1899 until 1904, a single truck shuttle car fed the St. Paul-Stillwater trains at Wildwood outside the rush hours.

In 1904 TCRT built a 4.3-mile line around the south side of White Bear Lake to the town of White Bear Lake. It ended in the downtown at 6th Street and Banning Avenue. Combined with the original line to Mahtomedi, TCRT now circled the east, south and west sides of White Bear Lake. The White Bear and Mahtomedi branches met the Stillwater-St. Paul main line at



Wildwood Park, on the lake's southeast corner. This was the site of TCRT's long-lived amusement park, a major traffic generator in its own right. Although TCRT tinkered with the service over the years, they designed the schedule so that passengers from Stillwater, Mahtomedi and White Bear Lake could make closely timed connections at Wildwood Park to reach any of those destinations.

There was one interesting wrinkle in the White Bear service. The wye to the branch was located just south of the Wildwood Park station. Any train that needed to stop at Wildwood to discharge or board passengers to make a backup movement in one direction between the wye and the station. It also had to cross over between the two main line tracks.

We have a copy of the May 15, 1917 employee timetable. In addition to the timed transfer connections described above, it shows a high level of service that we would find remarkable today, considering the modest population served by the Stillwater Division.

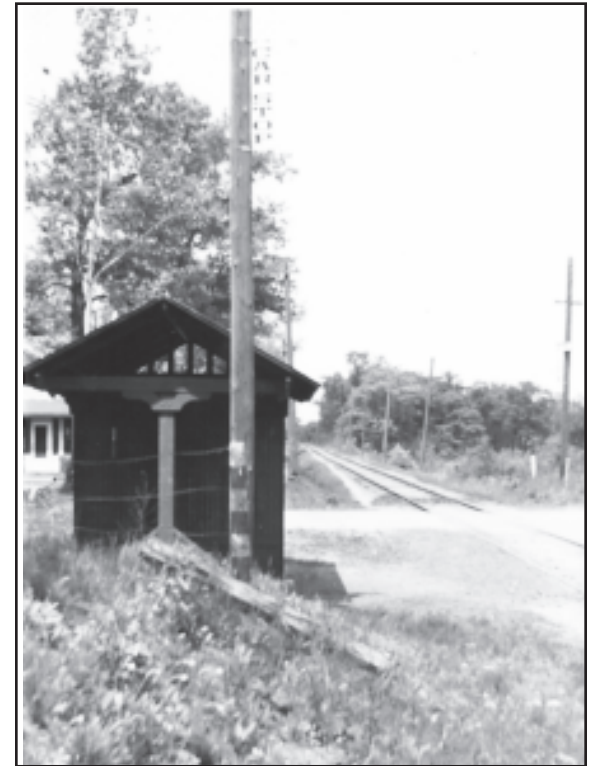
When reading the schedule it's important to remember that TCRT subsidiary Minneapolis & St. Paul Suburban Railroad followed steam railroad operating rules to run the Stillwater and Minnetonka Divisions. The streetcars were referred to as "trains". Each half-hourly departure had a train number, and

extra sections, as many as six separate streetcars, could operate under that train number on the same schedule. The only requirement was that the sections maintain a 2000-foot separation from each other. All day long, a typical weekday pattern was for each train to have three sections. The first was a short line that went only as far as St. Paul's Hazel Park neighborhood. Next came the Stillwater train, and then either the hourly Mahtomedi or White Bear train.

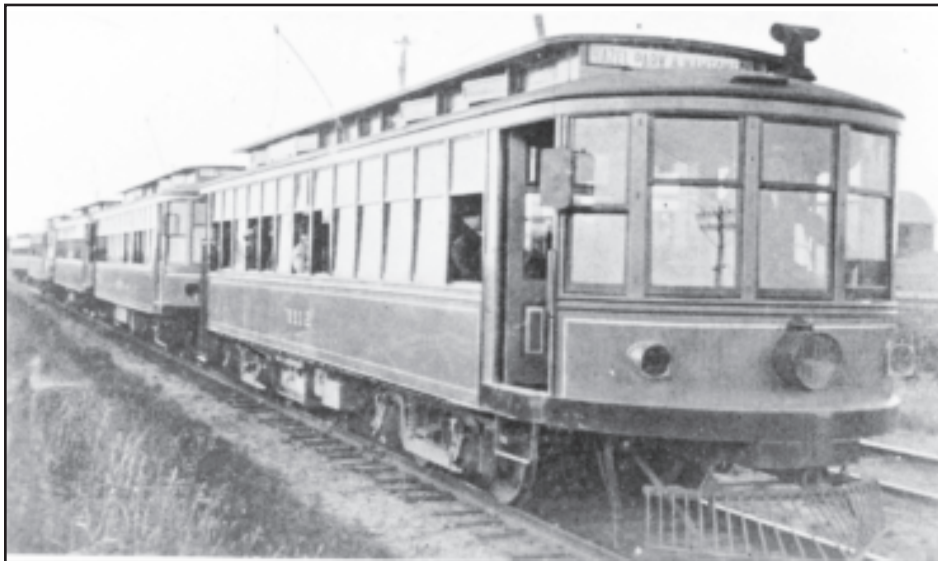
The interurbans used the East 7th Street line, which had its own local service. For that reason, the interurbans made no stops between downtown and Duluth Station at East 7th and Duluth, except to board passengers for points beyond Duluth.

During the rush hour, White Bear and Mahtomedi trains ran every 30 minutes. This produced the 5:27 and 5:57 PM departures from St. Paul, which included sections to Hazel Park, Mahtomedi, Wildwood, Stillwater and White Bear, in that order.

On weekends the Mahtomedi and White Bear branches received 30-minute service, twice the 60-minute weekday frequency. Weekends were also peak times at Wildwood Park. The result was that the trains ran in four sections all day--to Hazel Park, Stillwater, Mahtomedi and White Bear. On the weekends, that meant that all four sections of a train would be sched-



The East Shore stop on the Mahtomedi branch. This was the standard type of waiting shelter. They were installed at 23 locations on the Stillwater Division.



The only known photo of a 4-section train in a siding for a meet. The car they passed is at extreme left.

uled to meet four sections of opposing trains (see photo at left). If ridership required it, additional sections could be added, or additional trains at 15-minute intervals.

Outside the St. Paul city limits, the Stillwater Division was single track with periodic passing sidings. Given the number and frequency of trains, keeping the railroad fluid and preventing head-on collisions was a major challenge. TCRT based a dispatcher at Owen Street Station in Stillwater. Employee timetables governed the trains and indicated all scheduled meeting points. At those sidings were company telephone booths with train order signals that were remotely controlled by the dispatcher.

Crews called the dispatcher when leaving their terminals and at meeting points to receive permission to continue to the next one.

Travel time to the center of downtown St. Paul from Mahtomedi was 54 minutes. The fairly slow time explains why the Northern Pacific's suburban trains remained competitive for so long. The NP fielded 8 inbound and 10 outbound trains from Mahtomedi, with stops along the north shore of the lake. Running time to St. Paul varied from 35 to 45 minutes. Most required a transfer in White Bear, but those scheduled for commuters were through-routed and featured the faster time.





From White Bear to St. Paul the streetcar took 63 minutes, because of its indirect route and street running on St. Paul's east side. The NP ran a dozen round trips that took only 23-33 minutes, depending on the number of stops.

#### **Through service from Minneapolis**

In 1901 TCRT experimented with summer through streetcars from Minneapolis to Wildwood and Stillwater. The attractions were weekend and evening events at Wildwood Park, and visits to the Stillwater Prison.

On weekdays four hourly cars left Hennepin and Washington downtown at 1:10, 2:10, 3:10 and 4:10. They returned in the evening. Presumably they followed the University Avenue line between the cities. A one-way trip took 92 minutes. On weeknights a single car started at 31st and Hennepin at 7 PM for Wildwood. It passed through downtown Minneapolis at 7:18. Passengers had almost two hours at Wildwood, boarding the return car at 10:32 PM.

Weekends saw afternoon departures from Minneapolis, three of which continued to Stillwater.

It's unclear how long the Minneapolis trips lasted, but it seems likely they ran only during the summer of 1901.

Two scenes along the south shore of White Bear Lake on the White Bear branch. The bottom photo shows Ramaley's Pavilion in the distance. This was early enough that TCRT was still using detachable headlights.



### More than passengers

The Stillwater Division hauled pouch mail between post offices. Specifically, the pouch runs were:

1914-1935	St. Paul to North St. Paul
1914-1920	North St. Paul to Stillwater
1922-1932	St. Paul to Stillwater
1928-1932	Bayport to Stillwater
1930-1932	Mahtomedi to Willernie
1930-1932	St. Paul to White Bear
1933-1935	St. Paul to Mahtomedi
1936-1938	North St. Paul to Mahtomedi

Newspapers were carried on the first eastbound trip each day, referred to in the employee timetable as the Paper Car. On Sunday mornings paper bundles would fill the front half of the car. There's a conflict between the available employee timetables and Russ Olson's accounts. The timetables show the Paper Car as the first morning trip east. It started at Duluth Station, not from downtown. Russ' account says that shop men rode the car downtown from Duluth Station, helped load and sort the papers, and

### Fares in 1921

There were seven fare zones on the Stillwater Division. The fare within St. Paul was 5 cents. Here are the zone fares from St. Paul.

10 cents to Silver Lake, the far edge of North St. Paul

15 cents to Mahtomedi and Birchwood on the White Bear branch  
20 cents to White Bear and Leis on the Stillwater line

25 cents to the Stillwater city limits

30 cents to Stillwater

35 cents to South Stillwater (Bayport)



Two views of the Wildwood Park station, looking from the east. We have several group photos taken on these steps. Note that the streetcars are all chartered.



rode back to the station, where they departed. That would only be possible on a later car, not the ones labeled Paper Car, or maybe it happened in a different year.

Periodically Stillwater Prison would charter a car to run directly between St. Paul and the prison, with prisoners chained to the seats.

### **Stillwater Division changes through the years**

**-Russell Olson**

*Editor's note: Stillwater Division operations and track changed over the years. Russ put together this chronology in Electric Railways of Minnesota and the ERM Supplement, presented here with some editing. Note in particular how siding locations changed to fit schedule needs, causing train meets to be relocated.*

1904: When the White Bear branch opened in 1904, through trains were operated from St. Paul to White Bear and Mahtomedi only at certain times, with one train running at other times between White Bear and Mahtomedi, connecting at Wildwood with main line trains.

1904: Just south of Wildwood, the track S-curved around the west edge of a large pond. A fill running straight through the pond replaced the curve. It's visible today and hosts a bike trail.

1905: The White Bear and Mahtomedi line was formed, consolidating the previously separate operations. During the winter of 1905-1906 service to Mahtomedi was suspended.

1906: Bock Street (Hazelwood Avenue) Siding was installed.

1908: Grant Siding was installed, just east of the Soo Line underpass.

1908-1910: 60-minute service was provided to White Bear and Mahtomedi, but from late October through early April Mahtomedi had only seven daily round trips.

1911: Ames Avenue wye on St. Paul's east side was removed and relocated to Ivy Avenue in Hazel Park.

1912: Beginning June 10 through service from St. Paul to White Bear and Mahtomedi was operated during the morning and evening rush hours.

1912: The siding at the Stillwater Union Depot was completed. This permitted the Stillwater local cars to pass the interurbans that were laying over between trips at the depot. It's not clear how they passed when the loop was still single track. Operation on the Union Depot loop was changed from clockwise to counter-clockwise.

1914: The sidings at Bock Street

(Hazelwood Avenue), Chair Factory and Pullman were removed and replaced by sidings at Kerwin Street, Soo Line Crossing, Long Lake and Parrants. Lake Shore siding was added on the White Bear branch.

1917: The second track was added on East 7th Street from Duluth Avenue to Van Dyke Avenue, a block east of White Bear Avenue.

Date unknown: The Lake Shore siding on the White Bear branch was removed and replaced by the Bellaire siding on the south side of the lake.

1922: The second track was extended to Ivy Avenue, as far as it would go. Hyacinth Avenue, a block before Ivy, became the wye where all Hazel Park cars terminated.

1924: A crossover was installed just east of Duluth Avenue. By using it and the existing crossover at the Duluth



Station, eastbound local cars shifted over to the westbound track to allow Stillwater cars to overtake them.

1924: The old Mahtomedi turntable, used to turn the original St. Paul & White Bear RR cars was removed, along with the track connection to the Northern Pacific. The connection had been used to interchange coal cars, which were pulled to the Wildwood power house over the streetcar line.

Ridership peaked in 1921, then fell sharply through the 1920s due to automobile competition. 1924 was the last year the Stillwater Division was profitable, despite a fare increase and reduced service. The September 1924 timetable shows that weekday off-peak service was hourly to Stillwater, White Bear and Mahtomedi, although weekend 30-minute Stillwater service continued. By 1928 the weekend serv-



Left: Wildwood Park was the transfer point between Stillwater, Mahtomedi and White Bear trains. This fellow is hustling to make the connection.

Above: Until about 1929, The White Bear streetcars competed with Northern Pacific suburban trains that were much faster to St. Paul. They stopped here at Lake Shore, just south of downtown White Bear. Note the streetcar behind the shelter.

ice was also hourly.

1926: Bellaire Siding on the White Bear branch was removed. The track materials were reused to build Pennsylvania Siding in North St. Paul. Long Lake Siding was removed.

The Great Depression accelerated the decline. The last timetable in 1932 shows Mahtomedi midday service every two hours and Stillwater local cars every 40 minutes. During 1931, the last full year of service, the Stillwater Division carried 1.1 million passengers, down from the 1921 peak of 6.6 million.

Abandonment was inevitable. The interurban to Stillwater, the Stillwater local lines and the White Bear branch quit on August 10, 1932. With the abandonment of everything but the Mahtomedi line, the White Bear wye was removed and the materials used

to build the Henry Street wye in North St. Paul.

1938-1940: The spur tracks to the Wildwood Substation were removed.

1940: Because Wildwood Park shut down in 1938, car staging capacity on the Wildwood Siding was no longer needed and it was shortened. The crossover east of Duluth Avenue that allowed eastbound Stillwater cars to pass eastbound locals was removed.

1942: Two Wildwood storage tracks were removed.

1944: Colby and Soo Line Sidings were taken out of service and a new siding was installed at Henry Street in North St. Paul.

1946: Pennsylvania Siding in North St. Paul was removed.

1948: Colby and Soo Line Sidings were removed.



Above: An Owen Street local car at the end of the line in front of the Owen Street substation. The wood Owen Street Station is partially visible at left.  
Below right: From 1899 until about 1910, the 773-785 group of cars covered the St. Paul-Stillwater interurban runs.

## Rolling stock

The Stillwater and Lake Minnetonka lines were famous for their high speed versions of standard TCRT streetcars. However, the Stillwater line, which opened in 1899, predated them. The high speed cars did not appear until 1905, and were not assigned to Stillwater until 1909-1910.

When the Stillwater line opened, it was equipped with seven newly built cars #779-785 with 50 hp motors (the first motors that large) and the first ever air brakes. They had a top speed of 44 mph. Cars 773-778 were upgraded and added to the pool when the White Bear branch opened in 1904. The 773-785 group continued to serve the line until 1911 or 1912.

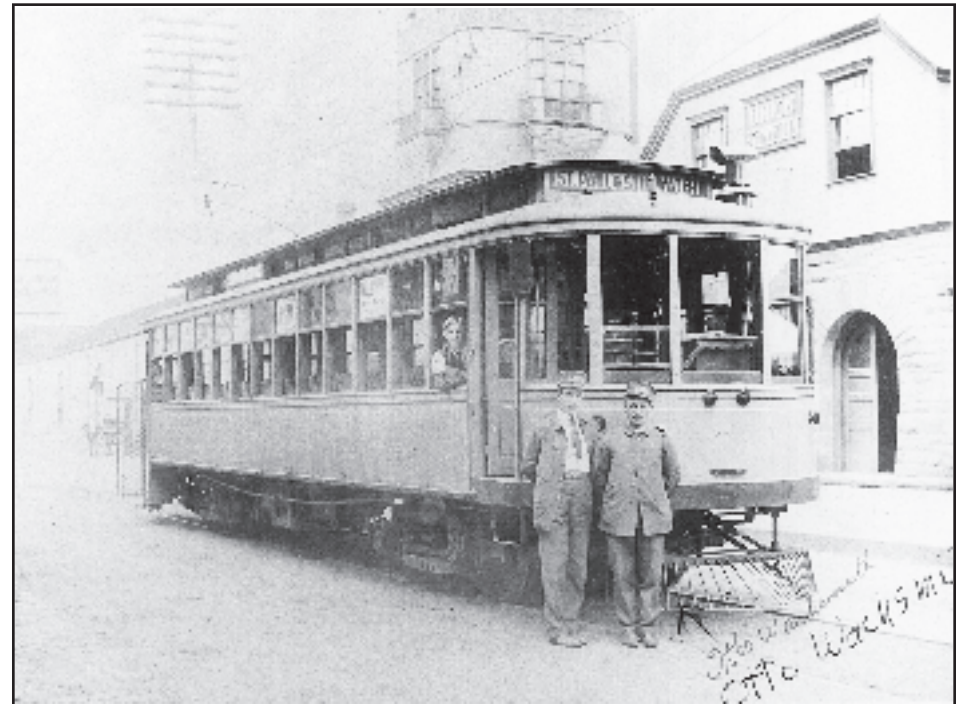
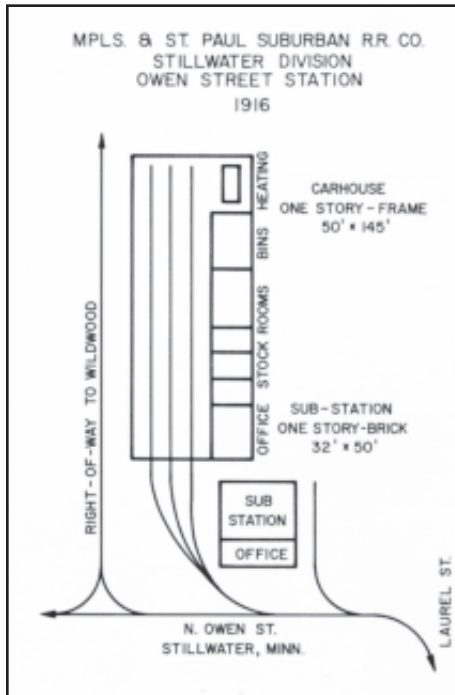
The high speeds debuted on the Minnetonka line where their 75 hp GE73 motors and taller gearing gave

them a top speed of 60 mph. As ridership grew, additional standard cars were converted to high speeds, until by 1914 there were 42 of them. A fleet of 21 cars, #1112-1121 and #1255-1265, were assigned to Stillwater, but were re-gearred to handle Stillwater's hills. Their top speed was reduced to 50+ mph. Even so, their faster speeds reduced Stillwater-St. Paul running time from 70 minutes to 66 minutes. They were supplemented by the faster standard cars for Wildwood Park extras.

After the 1932 abandonment of the Stillwater and White Bear lines, eight of the high speeds continued to serve the Mahtomedi line. Interestingly, it was not until 1932 that they received fare boxes for Pay As You Enter fare collection. Because of the multiple fare zones, on outbound trips passengers paid when they alighted. That group was reduced to four cars by 1934, and

## Owen Street Station

Although the Stillwater Division was mostly based at Duluth Station on St. Paul's east side, Stillwater itself was so far removed from the nearest carhouse that a small satellite facility was needed to house and maintain the cars that ran the pair of local lines. Thus was Owen Street Station constructed in 1899. It was a simple, 3-track, wood framed building with inside storage room for 9 streetcars. It was home to the four cars assigned to the local lines, one or two high speed suburban cars, plus a work car, wire car and snow-plow. The building was located where the private right of way started at the northwest edge of town. Next door was a brick electrical substation, which survives today as a residence. Owen Street could handle simple running repairs, but no heavy maintenance. It also housed the Stillwater Division dispatcher.







Above: After 1909, 21 of these high speed cars dominated the Stillwater Division. This one is in White Bear Lake. Note the pneumatic horn and the train number in the upper left front window.

Right: The four 1925-built lightweights covered all Stillwater local service. The schedule required three, leaving one spare. John Runk photo.

Below: Snow plow #38, assigned to Owen Street, clears Parrant's Siding. Runk photo.



all were retired in 1935. Thereafter, standard cars ran to Mahtomedi until abandonment in 1951. Except for a single fan trip, Mahtomedi never saw PCC cars.

From 1899 until 1925, the Stillwater local lines were run by four cars, mostly drawn from the short 37-foot group of Class C-3 cars built in 1901. Joining them for a few years was one of the four 1896-built "windsplitters", cobbled together from a pair of single trucks.

In 1925 Snelling Shops turned out four short versions of its own lightweight design, cars #1-4. They were identical to Duluth #301-305, produced at the same time. With their modern styling and improved passen-

ger comfort, the cars were a step up. They held down the local lines for seven years until abandonment in 1932. Afterwards they were deployed on lightly traveled lines around the system, and lasted until about 1950.

Three non-revenue work cars were assigned to the Owen Street Station. They differed somewhat from the cars assigned to larger stations, due to the need to maintain track through open country, and because of the railroad operating rules. All displayed train markers or electric classification lights on their front dashes and had steel pilots instead of fenders.

Conventional work car #48 was modified for double duty, first as a wire car, later as a sand car after wire



car #72 was assigned to Owen Street in 1917. Snow plow #38 differed from other plows because its front plow was double shear, meaning it was a wedge, plowing to both sides of the track. The other plows pushed snow to the right only.

### Stillwater's hills

After Duluth, the highest and steepest streetcar hills in Minnesota were in Stillwater. The climb out of town from Main Street was 230 vertical feet. It was steep as well. Bayport and Owen Street cars encountered 5 blocks of 7.5 percent (7.5 feet of climb for every 100 feet traveled) on Chestnut and South 3rd Streets. See the photo on the inside front cover. Once atop the bluff, they descended, albeit more gradually, to riverfront level in Bayport.

Interurbans and Wilkin Street cars climbed the steep block of Chestnut, then had it somewhat easier on the 5 blocks of 6.2 percent of North 4th Street (photo at right).

The hills were challenging enough that the 60 mph high speed suburban cars had to be geared down to 50 mph to deal with the hills.

### Power generation and distribution

When the St. Paul & White Bear electrified the former North St. Paul Railroad in 1892, it built a combined carhouse and powerhouse in North St. Paul at Pennsylvania Street, which would later be a siding location. When TCRT purchased the StP&WB in 1898, the North St. Paul powerhouse continued to supply power to the line, but all streetcar storage and operation was moved to the East 7th Street Station (later rebuilt as Duluth Station) at East 7th Street and Duluth Avenue.

The 1899 extension to Stillwater required an additional power source, so the Wildwood powerhouse was



A chartered interurban grinds up the 6 percent grade on North 4th Street, on rails shared with the Wilkin Street cars. Runk photo.

built. It received coal cars interchanged from the Northern Pacific in Mahtomedi and delivered via the TCRT Mahtomedi branch. A transmission line connected the powerhouse with the new Owen Street substation in Stillwater. The powerhouse also supplied electricity to Wildwood Park.

The completion of TCRT's Main Steam Station in 1903 consolidated

power generation at St. Anthony Falls. A cross-country transmission line was built to the newly constructed Wildwood Terminal House. The nearby Wildwood powerhouse was shut down and a substation was installed in the building. The North St. Paul powerhouse was closed.

### Wildwood Park

Wildwood Park predated TCRT, having been opened by the St. Paul & White Bear. TCRT upgraded it, marketed it heavily, and it became a major recreational attraction. The normal operating season was May 30 through September 1. In Electric Railways of Minnesota, Russ Olson summed up





the attractions as they were in 1916:

**Boating:** A fleet of rowboats was available for rentals. Gasoline powered launches left Wildwood Park dock at frequent intervals for lake trips; these were also available for charter by private parties.

**Fishing:** Fishing equipment of all kinds, including bait, was available at the Boat House.

**Picnicking:** The picnic grove was located along the shore of the lake. A Picnic Pavilion on the grounds, supplied with benches and picnic tables, also contained a refreshment counter where soft drinks, sandwiches, coffee (by the cup or in large quantities), ice cream (by the cone or gallon) and other refreshments were served. Adjoining the picnic pavilion was a picnic kitchen with heated stoves and freshwater.

**Playground outfits** for the children were provided and swings were scattered around the grounds. A place was provided for playing indoor baseball. Near the Waiting Station was a regulation size baseball diamond.

**Swimming:** A fine sandy beach was maintained. The Bath House contained rest rooms (the ladies' room was in charge of a matron) plus individual rooms provided with bath towels available for rental. Swimming garments could also be rented. Water sports devices were provided, including a water chute and a diving platform with several spring boards at various heights.

**Bowling:** A large building near the Waiting Station contained 11 fully equipped alleys.

The Roller Coaster offered a sensational and exhilarating ride.

Amusement features included: The fun factory (distorting mirrors), Postal Photo Gallery (photographs and photo postcards), Shooting Gallery, Penny Arcade, ball throwing and ring tossing, a Carousel, Ferris wheel, parachute drop and a miniature railroad.

On Sundays and holidays special programs of water sports were given, including baseball played on water, water polo, diving exhibitions and swimming matches. Private swimming lessons were offered.

The Dance Hall with promenade overlooking the lake was located in the Main Pavilion. Dancing to quality orchestras was offered every weekday from 2:30 to 5 PM, and from 8 to 10:30 PM. On Sundays free orchestral concerts were given from the veranda of the Main Pavilion.

The Restaurant in the Main Pavilion provided excellent food with a la carte service.

Despite annual improvements during the 1920s, attendance declined. After the 1932 abandonment, the park was leased to a succession of amusement companies, but slipped into the red financially. It closed after the 1938 season.

Top left: The St. Paul & White Bear car barn/powerhouse in North St. Paul. North St. Paul Historical Society collection.

Middle left: The Wildwood Power house after conversion to a substation.

Bottom left: The Wildwood Terminal House, where the high tension line from St. Anthony Falls ended.

Wildwood Park scenes.

Top: The lake shore, viewed from the top of the water slide. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Bottom left: The White Bear branch ran alongside the roller coaster.

Bottom right: Wildwood's miniature railroad.







THREE BIG OPENING DAYS  
**WILDWOOD PARK**  
(MANAGEMENT TWIN CITY LINES)  
 ON PICTURESQUE WHITE BEAR LAKE  
**May 28, 29 and 30**

**DANCING—DANCING—DANCING**  
 Regular Program, 2:30 to 5:00 P. M. and 8:00 to 10:30 P. M. Daily Except Sundays.  
 Admission, Afternoons, 30 Cents. Except Holidays. Evenings, 50 Cents.  
 Which Includes Check Room Privilege and War Tax.  
 Splendid Pavilion. Perfect Dance Floor. Promenade. Special Afternoon Dance Program May 30. Music by Augmented Minnesota State Orchestra.  
 Free Orchestral Concerts Every Sunday, on Veranda, 3 and 7:30 P. M.

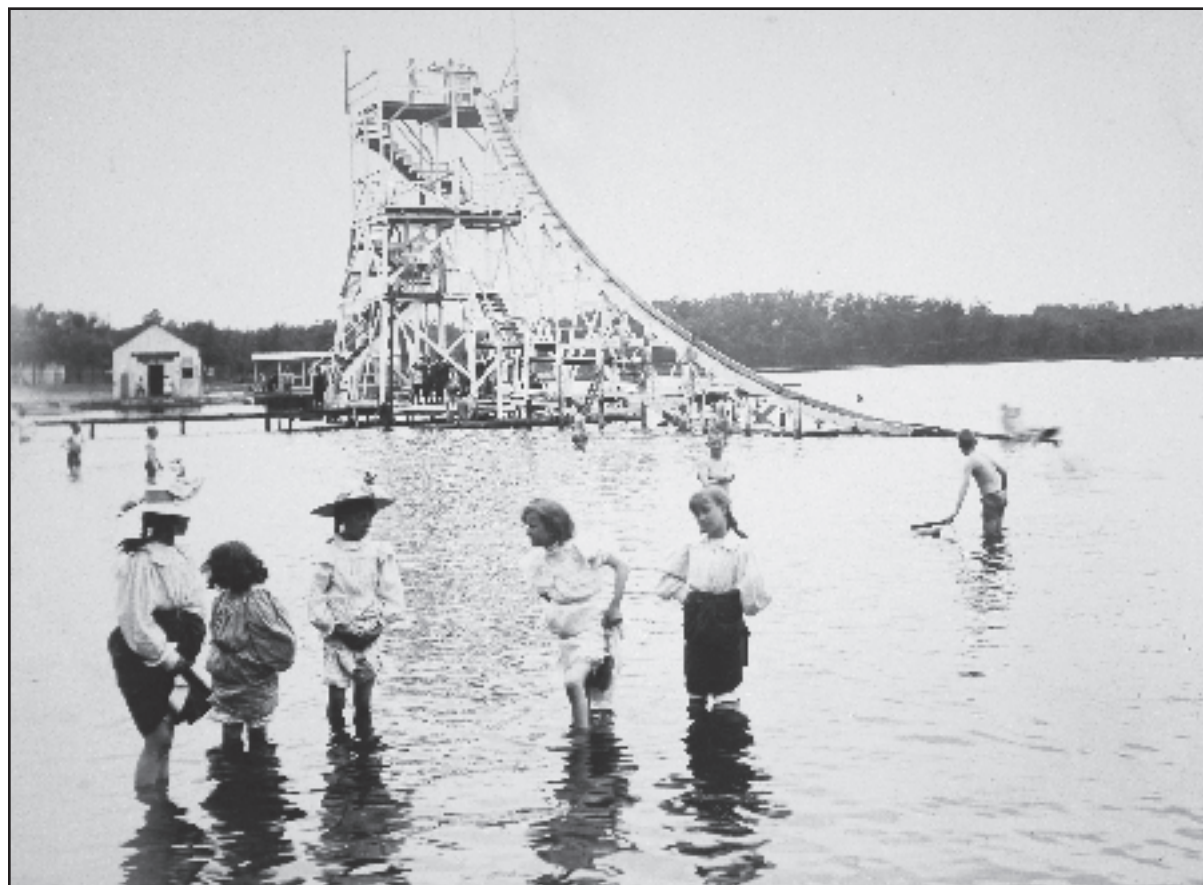
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 For Further Information About Wildwood Park, Telephone, Write  
 or Call Upon  
 W. O. Clark, General Passenger Agent, "Twin City Lines,"  
 Room 308, No. 1 Eleventh St. S., Minneapolis.  
 Telephone—Main 4335.



Above right: The waterslide at Wildwood Park.

The Wildwood pavilion. Both Minnesota Historical Society collection.



## Mahtomedi goes it alone

Somewhat surprisingly, the line to North St. Paul and Mahtomedi soldiered on after the 1932 abandonment of Stillwater and White Bear. That may be because TCRT couldn't discontinue service unilaterally. Approval had to be received from the Minnesota Railroad & Warehouse Commission. Since the mid-1920s TCRT had been running a competing bus service to Stillwater on a more direct route via Lake Elmo, so the public was still being served. Furthermore, the travel time was only 28 minutes, less than half the time taken by the interurban. TCRT also ran a more direct bus service to White Bear via Highway 61.

It could be that the North St. Paul-Mahtomedi line continued in service due to a lack of paved roads that duplicated the rail route.

Still, TCRT was looking for economies, and the easiest was eliminating most of the duplication between local streetcars and interurbans on the East 7th Street-Hazel Park portion of the route. It was first combined with the Grand Avenue line. That apparently didn't work, because three days later the Mahtomedi service was folded into the Randolph-Hazel Park line. Except for a few rush hour trips that bypassed them, the Mahtomedi cars made local stops all the way into St. Paul.

Wildwood Park quit in 1938 and its station stop was discontinued.

The 1945 timetable shows roughly half-hourly rush hour service, and hourly midday and evenings. There's a vestige of the old multi-section train departures. The 5:10 PM had three sections, terminating in North St. Paul, Willernie and Mahtomedi. The 6:10 had two sections. By this time meets occurred only at Henry Street in North St. Paul and Hyacinth Avenue, the



Having wyeed out, a car lays over at the Mahtomedi terminal. John Stern photo, ERA collection.

start of double track in Hazel Park.

The 8.35 miles of the Mahtomedi line beyond the end of double track and local service in Hazel Park finally quit on November 3, 1951. The rest of the line followed on May 17, 1952.

## Remnants

Because it traveled through open country, traces of the Stillwater Division can still be seen if you know where to look. There is still a bridge over the Chicago & North Western

tracks on the east side of St. Paul. It's a new bridge, but on the original abutments. It serves bikes and pedestrians, as does the right of way north from the bridge that curves northeast on the old right of way into the median of



Furness Parkway.

The right of way is now a trail running south from Wildwood Park for about a mile. This is the stretch called Wildwood Hill in streetcar days.

Most of the right of way through Mahtomedi is intact, and portions are a paved trail.

The Stillwater line right of way is visible where it follows County Road 12 east from Willernie.

I'm not sure if they're still there, but years ago Russ Olson and Gene Corbey found two or three square concrete cattle underpasses in the open country west of Stillwater.

As mentioned before, the Stillwater substation still stands.

Finally, a small three-sided retaining wall at the bottom of the Chestnut Street steps in Stillwater formerly enclosed the 3rd & Chestnut starter booth (see photo on Page 6).

Right: This is the Willernie wye. The track at left is the old Stillwater line. The wye was used daily by a rush hour car that was part of the 3-section 5:10 departure from St. Paul.

Below left: Passengers board at the Fairmount stop, next to Hamline Lake in Mahtomedi. The car is heeled over due to the S-curve superelevation.

Below right: The Oakleigh stop in Mahtomedi.





# Wildwood Park

WILDWOOD PARK,  
WHITE BEAR LAKE, MINN.







Abandonment is near in 1951, as a Mahtomedi car reaches the end of the line. The motorman will pull past the camera and back into the wye to turn the car, Then he'll enter that company phone booth and call the dispatcher for permission to leave on his next trip to St. Paul. Bob Mehlenbeck photo.



# MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

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Minneapolis, MN 55416-0509  
[www.TrolleyRide.org](http://www.TrolleyRide.org)

August 2021

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